



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Protecting the innocent is their mission

Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect present awards to outstanding advocates

Richmond, VA — The Commonwealth recognizes April as Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month, but for many, protecting children is their mission year round.

Cases in point:

- a Chesapeake attorney who makes himself available 24 hours a day to represent the abused;
- a Prince William social services chief who creates innovative programs to help stop abuse before it happens;
- a Norfolk pediatrician who works to raise the standards for other physicians;
- an 80-year-old Virginia Beach woman who has been a child advocate for more than four decades;
- a central Virginia lawyer who has represented more than 500 children;
- a James City County social worker who implemented an award-winning day care program for children in harm's way;
- a Hampton agency solely dedicated to providing programs that prevent abuse and neglect and strengthen families;
- and a Henrico man whose entire career was spent improving the lives of Virginia's most vulnerable children

The Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect Awards recognize Virginians who have exhibited a strong commitment to advocacy, protection, prevention, treatment and assistance.

"It is an honor and a privilege to recognize the men and women who champion the safety and security of our children," said Governor Timothy Kaine. "Their focus on prevention is especially critical." Awards were presented at this year's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month Conference in Richmond on April 2.

The Dr. Anthony Shaw Award for Exceptional Child Protective Services was established in 1992 and recognizes distinguished child protective services professionals for outstanding contributions to the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect. This year's recipient is Mary Ann Lee. Since 1982, Lee has improved the lives of children and families through her work with the

James City County Department of Social Services. Lee was instrumental in implementing an award-winning respite day care program for children whose family situations put them at risk for abuse and/or neglect.

The Governor's Advisory Board (GAB) also presents Certificate of Appreciation Awards to outstanding child advocates.

This year's Certificate of Appreciation recipients are:

- **Hampton Healthy Families Partnership**, which offers innovative programs ranging from parenting education classes to child fairs, all designed to strengthen families, prevent abuse and neglect and promote school readiness. Since its inception in 1992, Hampton Healthy Families has provided services to more than 12,500 families, positively impacted the lives of more than 30,000 children, been influential in reducing the City of Hampton's child abuse and neglect rate by nearly 27%, and has contributed significantly to reducing the teen pregnancy rate and increasing the immunization rate for the city's children.
- **John Oliver, Chesapeake**, counsel for human services with the City Attorney's Office: Oliver has helped transform and improve the lives of thousands; his cases range from those involving child abuse and neglect to foster care reviews to adult protection to guardianship for the elderly. Oliver is a former chair of GAB and has served with numerous legislative committees and advocacy groups.
- **Mary Russo, Virginia Beach**, volunteer: Russo will celebrate her 81st birthday in June and has dedicated more than 40 years to advocating for children and families. Russo single-handedly initiated the First Steps program in Hampton Roads. As the City of Virginia Beach's Volunteer Coordinator, she has inspired more than 23,000 people to volunteer nearly 1.4 million hours, valued at more than \$16 million annually. In recent years, Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera Oberndorf proclaimed May 18 as "Mary Russo Day" in honor of this advocate's volunteerism and commitment to children.
- **Suzanne P. Starling, MD, Norfolk**, medical director of the child abuse program with the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters (CHKD): As a pediatrician, Dr. Starling is a devoted advocate for children, treating thousands who have suffered at the hands of adults, providing expert testimony in court, serving on numerous investigative teams and working to raise the standards for pediatricians treating abused and neglected children. Starling founded the Forensic Pediatric Fellowship program at CHKD and serves on the boards of the American Board of Pediatrics and the State Child Fatality team.
- **Deborah S. Tinsley, Louisa**, advocate and attorney serving the social services departments of Louisa, Madison and Goochland Counties: Tinsley represents the abused and neglected children these agencies serve and works actively in prevention cases. Tinsley has represented more than 500 children throughout her career and dedicates as much time to education and prevention as she does to prosecution and protection.
- **Laurie Wilson, Prince William**, division chief for Prince William County Division of Social Services: Wilson is responsible for protective services, family treatment, foster care, adoption and adult services. Wilson was instrumental in developing programs to reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect and promote the safety and well-being of

children. Her work has contributed to the county's decrease in recidivism by lowering the risk of continued abuse.

In addition, Prevent Child Abuse Virginia (PCAV) presented its Champion for Children Award posthumously to Forrest Alvah Mercer, whose entire career was devoted to improving the lives of Virginia's most vulnerable children. Given annually by PCAV, this award recognizes outstanding commitment to its mission by an individual, organization, corporation, agency or community. Mercer first began working with children in 1974 in Loudoun County. From the 1990s until his retirement, Mercer worked in Richmond and managed the Safe and Stable Families program, which dealt with foster care prevention and family support. He worked closely with all 120 local departments of social services offices and many statewide organizations, including Prevent Child Abuse Virginia. He was a Henrico County resident.

The awards and conference were sponsored by the Virginia Department of Social Services and Prevent Child Abuse Virginia and co-sponsored by the Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect, the Family and Children's Trust Fund, the Child Abuse Prevention Committee and the Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention.

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Home Office is located in Richmond and administers social services programs, consistent with federal and state law and policy of the State Board of Social Services through 120 local departments of social services (LDSS) throughout the state. The VDSS mission is "People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse, and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities."

For more information, go to:

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov>

http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/prevention_month.cgi

<http://www.preventchildabuseva.org>

<http://www.fact.state.va.us>

<http://www.governor.virginia.gov/CitizenServices/ConstituentServices/Proclamations/2007/ChildAbusePrevMonth.cfm>

<http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/cps/index.html>

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Interviews and photos available upon request. For additional story ideas and for information on how your media outlet can help raise awareness of child abuse, neglect and prevention, please contact Carla Harris, VDSS, (804) 726-7107 or carla.harris@dss.virginia.gov.